



DD-341



DD-936



DDG-31

# USS Decatur Association Newsletter



2nd QTR -- 2013 -- Issue 2

## Spotlight on Decatur Sailors

### DD-341's James Jamison--(CAPT Retired)

*Excerpts from : Military Times: Hall of Valor*



Jim attended our 2012 reunion



Jim has been married to Ruth for 64 years and they have 2 daughters, 2 grandchildren, and 2 great-grandchildren. He is a native of Pittsburgh, PA. and was senatorially selected to attend the US Naval Academy, where he graduated with the Class of 1941 in February 1941.

His first ship was the USS DECATUR (DD-341). She escorted convoys in the North Atlantic while on neutrality patrol in September 1941.

He commissioned the USS BURNS (DD-588) as the Gunnery Officer in 1943, and became her Executive Officer in 1944. He served aboard her in the Pacific until 1945.

During that period the ship earned nine battle stars and Jamison was awarded a Silver Star Medal.

He had many other sea and land assignments before retiring from the Navy in 1968 and becoming a contractor. He was the XO of the USS BORDELON (DD881) and USS ROCHESTER (CA124). He had command of the USS FOGG (DE57), USS ROBERT McCARD (DD822), USS AJAX (AR6), and the Fleet Training Group, Western Pacific in Yokosuka, Japan.

**His Silver Star Citation reads:**

“The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Silver Star to Lieutenant James Pollock Jamison, United States Navy, for gallantry and intrepidity

in action while acting as Gunnery Officer of the Destroyer U.S.S. BURNS (DD-588), in action against a Japanese convoy on the night of 30 January 1944. He so well controlled the fire of his guns that he succeeded in sinking the whole convoy of four ships in a minimum of time and without casualty to either his ship or to his guns. His initiative, devotion to duty and professional ability were of the highest order. His conduct was at all times in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.”

(Action Date: January 30, 1944)

We are honored and proud of his Decatur heritage.

My name is Charles Schaub. I was a 3rd Class Radarman on DD341 from 1944 til decomission in 1945. I have a story to tell. We were up at New London Conn.having Exercises with a sub. The sub would shoot dummy torpedoes at us all day. At night we went outside of New London and were preparing to Anchor. It was war time so we were doing in the dark. DD341 had two anchors fasten on the Fore-castle. 1 Port One starboard. I was a Striker at that time in the CIC. Also worked as a seaman on anchor Detail. The anchor was helddown on the deck in2 parts by chains. As I was taking off the chains They hauled up the anchor and I was hit the head on thrown up against one of the stantions. The chief came over and put his flashlight on my head and said I was Bleeding. Went to sick Bay and got 4 stiches. I tell everybody I was the only sailor to get hit by an anchor.

by Tony West New RDs report to Newport, RI in October, 1966



Front Row (L-R): Rogers, Williams, Ruthart, Bunn, Whiteman  
Back Row (L-R): Myron, Gearhart, Van Vleet, O'Brien

The radar gang reported to the USS Decatur (DDG-31) in October, 1966. We reported to a barracks at the Naval Station, Newport, RI (home of US Navy's Officers candidate school (NOCS)). I was right out of boot camp so I saluted many OCS candidates. Our barracks was located right across from the "wave-cage." We could hear the women doing morning exercises. In my naivete, I thought "air those things out" refered to their bedding each morning. RD1 Bunn set me straight. The ship's company eventually migrated to barracks in Boston. I worked a part-time job as a janitor cleaning office building in Boston (with RD3 George Glynn from New Jersey...he often spoke of becoming a court stenographer) and sold my blood to the red-cross so I could fly home periodically via military stand by (half price).

We went aboard our new ship and began polishing our lockers with brasso. Our first time at sea, on a shake-down cruise, was memorable. I learned an Irish phrase on the cruise...with many guttural "O'Roarks."



"Remembering Bob"

Robert "Bob" Louis Helmreich died peacefully at his home in Granite Shoals, Texas on July 7, 2012. He was born April 29, 1937, the son of Ralph and Caroline Helmreich. He received his BS, MS, and PhD from Yale University. After receiving his bachelor's degree magna cum laude in 1959, he served in the U.S. Navy for four years, leaving the service as Executive Officer of the USS Decatur (DD936). Returning to Yale, Bob received his PhD in 1966 and joined the department of psychology at the University of Texas at Austin as Assistant Professor. He was promoted to Full Professor in 1969 and served on the faculty until 2007 when he retired and was named Professor Emeritus.

During his career, Bob's research focused on group behavior in challenging environments such as undersea exploration, aviation, space, and the medical operating room. He received the University of Texas' highest award, the Pro Bene Meritus Award in 2005. For his contributions to aviation safety, Bob received the Flight Safety Foundation Lifetime Achievement Award and the Franklin Taylor Award of the American Psychological Association. He authored more than two hundred monographs and books.

**Inside this issue**  
**Spotlighting James Jamison..1**  
**Human Interest.....2**  
**Sonar Dome.....3**  
**Reunion Update.....4**  
**Sailor Cadets.....5**  
**WWII with Orville Shipp.....6**

## Sea Buoy -- 1 vs Sonar Dome -- 0



by Richard Willis (DDG-31, FTM1, rode the Decatur 1966-1970)

### **Another DECATUR First!!!**

**In the 1960's I had the honor of being assigned to the pre-commissioning crew of the Guided Missile Destroyer USS DECATUR DDG 31. She was originally commissioned as the DD 936 but her fortunes and future were altered one day in May 1964 off of the Virginia Capes when she was involved in a collision with the USS Lake Champlain CVS 39. In a money-saving move, the Navy opted to reconfigure her as a guided missile destroyer.**

**Fast forward to 1967 and the Boston Naval Shipyard. The DECATUR slowly morphed from a gun ship to a missile ship at the hands of the mechanics and engineers in the shipyard. Her pre-commissioning crew arrived and worked with the yard to facilitate the necessary changes and with the achievement of each milestone the Commanding Officer proudly announced "Another DECATUR first!"**

**In the spring of 1968 DECATUR was almost ready to join the fighting fleet. She had excelled in the entire gun and missile certification exercises, passed all engineering trials with flying colors, and survived the trip from Boston to her new home port of Long Beach, California. All along the way the clarion call of "Another DECATUR first" rang out over the 1MC public announcing system. The last obstacle was Refresher Training in San Diego. This is a strenuous test of the crew's ability to function under any and all circumstances from daily operations to combat and emergency responses. One of the emergency drills is for only the duty section to get the ship underway. She was moored to buoys in San Diego Bay when the operation commenced early one bright Monday morning. The Officer of the Deck smartly made all preparations for getting underway, duty section personnel manned the mooring lines, and deck crew manned ships boats to disconnect her from the buoys. From the first movement it became clear that all was not well. As she backed down from the buoy it came closer. Soon the buoy started to sink and get still closer. Suddenly there was a sound of rending metal and the buoy shot heavenward. Investigation by divers discovered that somehow one of the buoy's mooring chains had slipped behind the ship's sonar dome and as she backed down it increased pressure on the dome until the chain ripped through the dome's outer cover. DECATUR limped back to Long Beach and the shipyard for repairs. The damaged dome cover was removed in dry dock and placed on pallets on the pier.**

**As dawn spread first light over the pier the dome was illuminated and on it in bright blue letters was the legend "Another DECATUR first".**

## 2013 Decatur Reunion Particulars

Please attend our 2013 reunion in San Diego, CA. It will be in September 19-22 2013 (4 nights)...Thursday-Sunday. Checking out 23 September (Monday). The Town and Country Resort Hotel will host at \$99 per night (plus 14.5% taxes). Call 1-800-722-8527 and mention the "USS Decatur Association."

**ALL** sailors that served aboard **any** Decatur are welcome to attend the reunion or join our association.

Please send a \$40 reunion registration fee to:

USS Decatur Association (Checks payable to):  
P.O. Box 829  
Pittsfield, MA 01202-0829

~~~~~  
Please join our USS Decatur Association:  
Send \$24 for TWO years of membership (or)  
our **NEW** option of a LIFETIME membership  
for \$125 to:

USS Decatur Association (Checks payable to):  
P.O. Box 829  
Pittsfield, MA 01202-0829

Next issue -- Look for:



- The next installment of our own GM2 Orville T. Shipp's compelling DD-341 exploits during WW II.
- More Reunion information.
- Our next Decatur sailor spotlight -- Al Mehldau (CAPT-Retired) rode the DD-936
- Info on our 1st annual USS Decatur reunion golf tournament.

~ and much more...

## Ships visited from past Reunions



*2012 USS Barry DD-938 in Washington, DC*



*2011 USS Cassin Young (DD-793) in Boston, MA*



*2010 USS Yorktown (CV-10) in Charleston, SC*



*2009 USS Wisconsin (BB-64) in Norfolk, VA*

*Continued in the Next Issue*



## A Presentation to The Halsey Battalion Sea Cadets of Decatur, Texas Veteran's Day - 11 November, 2012 -- by Jim Stewart (1966-1970)

As some of you Decatur Association members know, my wife Barbara and I are from Decatur, Texas, a small country town about 40 miles west of Ft Worth, Texas. While I was born there, I only attended second grade and my senior year in high school; the rest of my childhood was spent living all across the country, including ten years in Germany as an "Army Brat". My dad was a career Army officer, so we moved around as military families do. After graduation, I got the Hell out of Decatur as fast as I could since I had a hard time fitting in, and joined the Navy. Getting assigned to The USS Decatur out of boot camp was almost more than I could handle!! So therein lays the irony in this whole story!!



I subscribe to the local Decatur newspaper even though we live in Plano, Texas. (Gotta keep tabs on the obituaries to see who may have kicked off from my horrible high school year there!) Imagine my utter shock and surprise when I received the paper last month, and on the front cover, was this photograph of a young boy, dressed in a sailor's uniform, standing on the pier in Galveston, Texas while attending the commissioning of the Navy's newest war ship, The USS Ft. Worth! The accompanying article explained that this young sailor was a member of the Halsey Battalion Sea Cadets of Decatur! I was floored since I had no idea such an organization tied to the US Navy was located in my old hometown. I called the Commander of the Battalion and spoke to her about attending a meeting and presenting each Cadet with a USS Decatur DDG-31 ball cap like the ones we all wear. She was very excited about that offer and was pretty floored when I explained I was from Decatur and served aboard the DDG 31. She invited me to give the Cadets a brief presentation about our beloved ship and just chat with them about life on a destroyer.

I put together a brief history of the five ships named after Stephen F. Decatur. This presentation also contained slides about our Association and what goes on during the annual Reunions. As coincidence would have it, the Battalion held an Honor Guard the previous day which was Veterans Day, at the Decatur Veterans Memorial Park. In attendance were over 30 World War II vets from the surrounding towns and counties close to Decatur. I showed them the photos of our last Reunion where our guest of honor was Captain James Jamison, recipient of the Silver Star! They loved that!!

I also gave them a few slides about the Navy tradition of crossing the Equator and diving into the Realm of King Neptune while transitioning from a slimy Pollywog to a Trusted Shellback! Needless to say, the graphic of kissing King Neptune's greased belly elicited lots of gasps and groans from the room! Hope I didn't scare anyone off from joining the Navy!

I also showed them the video of the SINKEX, when DDG-31 was sunk in the Naval exercise off the coast of Kauai back in 1994. They were impressed with that.

Lastly, the presentation described the current USS Decatur DDG-73, along with a copy of the personal letter I received from her then current Commanding Officer, Captain Cynthia Thebaud, who is now a Rear Admiral serving at the Pentagon. Needless to say, the two young lady members of the Battalion thought that was awesome that a woman was the CO of DDG 73, and they both live in Decatur!!

All in all, that was a very special day for me to participate in The Halsey Battalion monthly meeting and I believe the kids had a great time seeing how life works aboard a real war ship at sea. Unfortunately, a very bad weather day blew in which prevented half of the Battalion from attending, but all 25 Cadets did receive their DDG 31 ball caps.

The Halsey Battalion is a national organization with chapters all across the USA, so check them out on-line and see if one happens to be close to where you live. If so, contact the CO and see if they would like to have you show up and do a presentation similar to the one I did. I promise you those kids loved seeing something out of their normal routine, and would be grateful to you for giving them a good laugh as well as some history! If anyone reading the Newsletter would like a copy of the PowerPoint I put together, please email me at [singlemaltbiker@gmail.com](mailto:singlemaltbiker@gmail.com) and I will email a copy to you.

This is GM2 Orville T. Shipp's (we lost him on 7 January 2010) article chronicling the USS Decatur (DD-341) throughout her WW II years. I'll provide a page each Newsletter. The pages are NOT edited and are presented directly as they came from his typewriter.



Second trip - left Puerto Rico and arrived St. Thomas no exact dates (around April 1943). Left St. Thomas and arrived Aruba. Left Aruba with 5 tankers and 3 escort vessels. Arrived in Algiers, Africa in the Mediterranean Sea had one good contact with German sub. We dropped depth charges, no positive kill. Trip was 14 days one way: convoy safely crossed and returned. Had a torpedo fired at us in Caribbean Sea but could not find sub.

Third trip - no exact dates taken but around July and August 1943 left Aruba with 7 tankers and 3 escorts. On this trip bridge reported a torpedo fired at us or convoy but again could not locate German sub. Dropped charges on sub near Gibraltar not sure of any hits. Arrived Algiers, tankers unloaded: (I believe this was fuel for our airplanes, tanks and trucks. Convoy safely crossed and returned. (Note: most of these tankers hauled airplane engines, jeeps, trucks, food and other parts strapped to their decks. Most of these tankers rode very low in the water.

Fourth trip - no exact dates taken approximately Sept. and Oct. 1943. Eight tankers and three destroyers were taken on trip from Aruba to Algiers with airplanes strapped to decks of tankers. Convoy safely crossed and returned.

Fifth trip - no exact dates taken, approximately started in early November 1943. We had small aircraft carrier, USS Card (we called these baby carriers). It held approximately 35 airplanes, some torpedo bombers, some dive bombers, and 3 destroyer escorts; USS Leary DD158, USS Schenck DD159, USS Decatur DD341. Left Norfolk, VA operated in and around Bay of Biscay. This is an area between Spain and France, and was mainly a submarine hunt. We had very rough seas we had one refueling in Azors. This refueling was (according to British sailors) from a former supply and refueling

